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We Claim:

1.   A network management system sharable by a plurality of operators, comprising:

a compartmented operating system having a number of compartments corresponding to the plurality of operators and each compartment having access control;

means for assigning the operators to respective compartments; and

common operations software;

whereby each operator accesses the network management system via the access control of the compartment assigned to that operator and the compartment executes in isolation the operations software for its operator.

2.   A network element in a communications system, said network element being sharable by a plurality of operators comprising:

a compartmented operating system having a number of compartments corresponding to the plurality of operators and each compartment having access control;

means for assigning the operators to respective compartments; and

common operations software;

whereby each operator accesses the network element via the access control of the compartment assigned to that operator and the compartment executes in isolation the operations software for its operator.

3.   The network element as defined in claim 2 wherein administration of said compartmented operating system is separated into multiple roles.

4.   The network element as defined in claim 3 wherein one of said multiple roles is dedicated to creating compartments for respective operators.

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5.   The network element as defined in claim 3 wherein one of said multiple roles is dedicated to operator administration in each compartment.

6.   The network element as defined in claim 2 wherein said operations software is application software.

7.   The network element as defined in claim 2 wherein said operators are remote from said network element.

8.   A method of controlling access to a network element in a communications system wherein said network element is sharable by a plurality of operators, said method comprising:

providing a compartmented operating system having a number of compartments corresponding to the plurality of operators and each compartment having access control;

assigning the operators to respective compartments; and

providing common operations software;

whereby each operator accesses the network element via the access control of the compartment assigned to that operator and the compartment executes in isolation the operations software for its operator.